



Frequently Asked Questions

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General Information

What is a health information exchange?

A *health information exchange* is a way to bring clinical data together to improve patient care. A health information exchange is a computer network that allows health care organizations involved in a patient's care to share certain information electronically. In a health information exchange, paper records are replaced with *electronic health records*. Primary care practices, specialty practices, hospitals, laboratories, imaging centers, and pharmacies can more easily and securely share a patient's health information. With a patient's permission, certain information is electronically pushed from a physician, hospital, laboratory, pharmacy, hospital and other health care entities to create a *Clinical Health Summary*, which is accessible to other clinicians who are also using the health information exchange.

What is Wellport?

Wellport is the health information exchange used by many medical practices in the Merrimack Valley. It is a new way for your clinicians to share your health information quickly, securely, and reliably with other health institutions and clinicians in the community. With Wellport, medical practices and hospitals are connected through a secure and protected computer network. Clinicians expect Wellport to help improve the safety, quality, and efficiency of the health care you receive.

Patients will also be invited to participate in Wellport using a feature called the *Personal Health Summary*. Using the Personal Health Summary, patients will be able to view much of their health information and perform certain tasks on a computer.

How do I participate?

Adult

If you are eighteen or older, simply read [Giving Permission to Share My Health Information](#). Then print out the [consent form](#) **and bring** it to your participating doctor's office or health care facility listed [here](#).

Parents of children under twelve years of age

Simply read [Giving Permission to Share My Health Information](#). Then print out the [consent form](#) **and bring** it to your child's participating doctor's office or health care facility listed [here](#).

Minor children between 12 and 17 and their parents

- Read [Giving Permission to Share My Health Information](#)
- Read [Letter to Parents](#)
- Print out the [Assent Form](#) *and bring* it to any listed health care facility attended by the minor child

Important. Do not mail consent or assent forms.

What does Wellport have to offer me?

Wellport offers many benefits for patients:

- You may spend less time filling out forms and repeating information about your# medical history.
- You will not have to worry about forgetting an important detail about your medical history, medications, or allergies when you are seen in a clinician's office.
- You may avoid having unnecessary duplicate diagnostic tests because your clinician will be able to view the tests and results that have been ordered for you by other clinicians.
- You may receive better care because your clinicians will be able to access your information more quickly.
- In an emergency, information about our medical history may be readily available to the clinicians treating you.

What is an electronic health record (EHR)?

You may have noticed that many physicians and other clinicians in the Merrimack Valley have replaced their old paper charts with electronic charts called *electronic health records*. Electronic health records allow clinicians to record and store health information on a computer. Electronic health records store the same types of information that have traditionally been captured on a paper chart -- but in a more secure way.

How can I learn more about Wellport and the participating organizations?

If you have any questions about Wellport or if you want a list of practices and organizations that are participating in Wellport, please view the list at the end of this document, see www.wellporthealth.net, or visit a participating Wellport practice.

What will happen to my old paper charts?

If a paper chart is scanned and added to an electronic health record, the paper record can then legally be destroyed if done in an appropriate manner. If it is not scanned and added to your electronic health record, it—like all paper charts—must be kept for 7 years in a medical practice and 30 years in a hospital. You are entitled to a copy of your medical record no matter how it is stored.

Clinical Health Summaries

What is a clinical health summary?

With your consent, some key health information from your clinicians' electronic health records will be used to create a summary of your health information. This list is called a *Clinical Health Summary*. Your Clinical Health Summary can be accessed by physicians

and other clinicians who are participating in Wellport so that they can better coordinate your care.

How is information shared in Wellport?

Wellport serves two important functions, and information is shared in two ways:

- Wellport is the central data storage area for clinical health summaries. Participating clinicians who are involved in your care can access the information in your Clinical Health Summary through Wellport.
- Wellport is also the secure electronic “pipeline” your medical information will travel through from clinician to clinician, whether or not you have a clinical health summary. Until now, clinicians exchanged specific information about you directly by phone, fax, or mail. That practice will continue, and clinicians will also be able to use Wellport to more securely send information about you over the computer directly from one clinician to another to help coordinate your care.

How is my Clinical Health Summary created?

Each time you visit a hospital or a physician's office, laboratory, or imaging center that participates in Wellport, the results of that visit are stored at that location in an electronic health record.

If you have consented to a Clinical Health Summary, selected information is sent through a secure central computer network to create your Clinical Health Summary. Within 24 hours, your information should become available to other clinicians in the network so that they can better coordinate your care.

Laboratory, radiology, and other finalized test reports are sent directly to your clinician and become part of your electronic health record. After reviewing them, your clinician can add the results to your Clinical Health Summary.

What information does a Clinical Health Summary include?

A Clinical Health Summary includes information about your medications, allergies, current medical conditions, pregnancies, surgeries, and recent laboratory and imaging results. It also may have information about past medical and surgical history.

May I choose not to have a Clinical Health Summary?

You may choose *not* to have a Clinical Health Summary. In order for a Clinical Health Summary to be created for you, you *must* consent to have medical practices release your information to Wellport.

How can I specify who adds information to my Clinical Health Summary?

You may choose whether to share your health information in your Clinical Health Summary with all clinicians and health care institutions that provide your health care BUT you may not select individual practices that may or may not share your health information. You can obtain a “PERMISSION TO SHARE MY HEALTH INFORMATION WITH WELLPORT” form from any practice, hospital or other health care entity that participates in Wellport, or from www.wellporthealth.net.

Who will have access to my Clinical Health Summary?

Only authorized individuals—that is, physicians, clinicians, and other staff on the Wellport system and involved in your care—will be permitted to have access to your health information. These authorized individuals may view your Clinical Health Summary even if they are not adding new information to your summary. Wellport keeps a log (a record) of every individual who has viewed your health information.

How will you protect my information?

Protecting your privacy is paramount and is a critically important responsibility for Wellport. Many safeguards are in place to keep information secure.

- All of your information is encrypted (scrambled) when it is stored and transmitted. In fact, Wellport has similar protections to those used by financial institutions.

- To prevent the loss of data, your health information is saved in duplicate in undisclosed and secure locations.
- Only certain individuals are permitted to access your Clinical Health Summary: physicians, other clinicians, hospital staff in the Merrimack Valley, and those parties who have been engaged to help operate and manage Wellport. These parties are allowed to access your information only for specifically and legally permitted purposes. No other individuals are permitted to access this information.

How do you restrict clinician access to my Clinical Health Summary?

For your protection, access to your information is carefully restricted.

- Only authorized individuals—that is, physicians and other clinicians and staff—are permitted to access the Wellport network.
- Only authorized individuals who are involved in your care may access your information, and then only when it is needed for treatment purposes.
- Authorized individuals must use a unique login and password to gain access to data they are authorized to view.
- There is a log (record) of everyone who accesses information. These records are audited regularly to spot inappropriate access or uses of the Wellport network.
- Both physical and electronic barriers help reduce the risk of unauthorized access.
- Penalties are in place in the unlikely event that there is unauthorized access or use of the Wellport network. Federal and state laws provide guidance around privacy and security.

How will having a Clinical Health Summary help me?

Having a Clinical Health Summary offers many benefits. The health care community believes that for the vast majority of patients, the benefits of sharing delicate and private information exceed any benefit of keeping that information from clinicians. It is, of course, your choice.

- If you have a Clinical Health Summary, all participating clinicians involved in your care should have access to a regularly updated summary of your current health information, including medications and allergies, giving them a more complete and up-to-date picture of you and your health.
- In the event of a medical emergency, information about your medications, allergies, and medical history should be more easily available to facilitate quality care and to help protect you from potentially harmful treatments.
- You may save time at medical visits and consultations because your information should already be available.
- Because your Clinical Health Summary is updated frequently, the number of duplicate diagnostic studies may be reduced.
- You should no longer need to worry about forgetting an important detail about your medical history, medications, or allergies when you are seen in a clinician's office.

What are the potential risks of having a Clinical Health Summary?

There may be some risks associated with having a Clinical Health Summary.

- You may consider parts of your medical history too sensitive to share with certain clinicians. Your medical history could include information related to specific conditions such as sexually transmitted diseases, mental health, pregnancies, HIV status, genetic conditions, chronic conditions, alcohol or drug problems, or other conditions that you may consider sensitive.
- Unauthorized individuals could gain access to the computer network.
- An authorized user could misuse health information.
- An authorized person could see information in your record that makes you uncomfortable.
- There is a possibility that inaccurate information could be accidentally entered into your electronic record and shared with others through your Clinical Health Summary. This could have a negative impact on your care.

Physicians and other clinicians in our medical community believe that for the vast majority of patients, the benefits of sharing private information exceed any benefit of keeping that information from your clinicians. It is, of course, your choice.

What are the potential consequences of not having a Clinical Health Summary?

If you do not have a Clinical Health Summary, you may experience some inconveniences or challenges:

- When you visit a participating specialist, he or she may not have access to your current health information, including medications and allergies.
- In the event of a medical emergency, information about your medications, allergies, and medical history may not be available to the clinicians treating you.
- You may spend time filling out repetitive medical history forms.
- Clinicians may order unnecessary duplicate diagnostic tests for you.
- You may worry that you are forgetting an important detail about your medical history, medications, or allergies when you are seen in a clinician's office.
- Clinicians may not be able to access medical information about you as rapidly.

May clinicians share information that is not in my Clinical Health Summary?

The details of actual medical visits and specific medical notes may **not** be part of your Clinical Health Summary and are therefore **not** kept in a central location. They are saved in your electronic health record at the location where your care is given. It is possible for a clinician using your Clinical Health Summary to access some of that information within moments by requesting it specifically.

If another clinician caring for you has a need for details from your electronic health record that are not part of your Clinical Health Summary, the information is encrypted and may be sent directly from one of the practices participating in Wellport to another. These details could include progress notes, visit notes, and other information about your medical history. A log (record) is kept of all instances of communication among clinicians. See the information about the Mass HIway in the next paragraph.

Is my health information shared outside of the Merrimack Valley?

Although Wellport is part of a national effort to improve patient safety and the quality of health care, your clinical Health Summary is not shared outside of the Merrimack Valley Medical Community. Wellport is connected to the Mass HIway that makes it possible for physicians anywhere in Massachusetts with a legitimate reason (providing your health care) to request some of your health information from a specific physician or health care institution through Wellport. It will be possible for your clinician to then send that information to the requesting clinician over the secure Mass HIway. The Mass HIway under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services of the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts also uses secure encryption (scrambling) to protect your privacy and security. Physicians and others have to prove who they are before they can use the Mass HIway. All of those transactions are recorded by both the Mass HIway and Wellport. When you consent to be share your health information with Wellport, it includes your consent to participate in the Mass HIway.

Will any information be available in Wellport without my permission?

In order to ensure the safe, accurate, and timely delivery of your health information to your authorized clinicians, each practice or participating hospital where you are seen has provided your name, date of birth, address, and other identifying information to Wellport. This information will only be viewable by authorized parties who need to use it to operate Wellport or to provide your health care.

How may Wellport improve public health and safety?

The measurement, monitoring, and reporting of community health data is expected to improve the quality and efficiency of patient care and public health.

- Wellport may combine patient data from each participating community medical office in order to spot health trends in the community.
- Wellport may help physicians and scientists determine the origin or cause of an epidemic, the release of a harmful substance, or the release of an infectious agent.
- The regularly updated information from shared health summaries could help clinicians and public health officials on the local, regional, and state levels create healthier communities. For example, it is helpful to know the rate of immunizations in any given community and whether children are being protected. Using paper records is more time consuming and results in less reliable information. When health information is needed for measurement and recording, electronic records make it easier to protect patients' privacy because personal information is removed and data are grouped.
- Massachusetts laws require the reporting of certain conditions to public health authorities, and electronic health information may help to quickly identify individuals with those conditions.
- Wellport may produce reports on clinical measures for use by the clinicians in the community.

Personal Health Summary: Accessing your health information from home

What is the Personal Health Summary?

An important feature of Wellport is a service called the *Personal Health Summary*. You, the patient, will be able to have direct access to important information from your medical records over the internet from any computer using the Personal Health Summary.

How will the Personal Health Summary help me and my loved ones?

Using the Personal Health Summary, you will be able to access key information about your health over the internet from any computer.

- Review relevant, up-to-date health information and care instructions
- Access test results and imaging reports (such as lab results and x-ray reports)
- Receive health reminders for routine tests and check-ups
- Communicate with selected physicians and staff using secure messaging
- Request or cancel an appointment with a participating physician's office
- Request referrals, forms, or documents
- Print a copy of your health information to take with you to a physician not participating in Wellport
- View health information for your children, elderly parents, or other family members in your care.
- Send an encrypted email over the Mass HIway when that service is available to patients

How can I protect my information when using the Personal Health Summary?

Take the following precautions to protect your private health information when using the Personal Health Summary:

- Be careful with your password. Just as when you bank on the internet, you must not share your password with anyone. Do not write it down where someone else might see it.
- Be careful when using the Personal Health Summary on a computer that does not belong to you. Be aware, for instance, that anything that appears on your employer's computer belongs to your employer.
- Do not save any of your health information on a computer that does not belong to you.
- Be sure to close the internet browser when you are finished viewing your health information.

How will you make sure my information is safe in my Personal Health Summary?

The information on the Personal Health Summary is encrypted (scrambled) and can only be accessed with unique user names and passwords.

Can I access information about people I am authorized to care for?

Using the Personal Health Summary, you may access information about people you are authorized to care for (such as elderly parents) with their permission.

Signing the Consent Form

Should I sign the consent form?

You need to decide whether or not you want to have a Clinical Health Summary. If you do, you must sign the *PERMISSION TO SHARE MY HEALTH INFORMATION WITH WELLPORT* form authorizing your physician to release information to Wellport in order to create a Clinical Health Summary for you. You cannot have a Personal Health Summary unless you have a Clinical Health Summary. For almost everyone, the benefits— which include the potential of enhanced patient care and safety—should outweigh the potential risks. Note that you do not get to choose which practices and hospitals participate in creating your Clinical Health Summary. Completing a single *PERMISSION TO SHARE MY HEALTH INFORMATION WITH WELLPORT* form at any health institution is all you need to do. If you have concerns about having a Clinical Health Summary, have a frank discussion with your clinician about your concerns, and about the benefits and risks.

Why do some patients decide not to sign the *PERMISSION TO SHARE MY HEALTH INFORMATION WITH WELLPORT* form?

Some patients may choose not to allow the release of information to a Clinical Health Summary for a variety of reasons:

- Some patients have information in their medical records that they feel is too private to share. This may include information about particular pregnancies, surgical procedures, diagnoses and medications for mental health, psychiatric diagnoses, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, or drug and alcohol abuse.
- Some patients may be concerned that a neighbor or acquaintance who works in a clinician's office will see the information in their Clinical Health Summaries.

- Some patients may want only a particular physician to be aware of their medical information. They may want to have the option to share it only in specific circumstances with other physicians.
- Since no security system is perfect, some patients may fear a security breach.

The medical and health care community believes that for the vast majority of patients, the benefits of sharing private information exceed any benefit of keeping that information from your clinicians. It is, of course, your choice.

Do I have to complete a separate *PERMISSION TO SHARE MY HEALTH INFORMATION WITH WELLPORT* form for each practice or hospital?

No.

What if I change my mind about having a Clinical Health Summary?

You may stop sharing your Clinical Health Summary with the members of Wellport at any time. To withdraw permission for your Clinical Health sign a Request to Withdraw form at that participating practice or facility or get the form at www.wellporthealth.net. Any information already imported into any clinician's records cannot be removed. However, within five business days of Wellport acknowledging receipt of a Request to Withdraw form, no new information will be added to your Clinical Health Summary.

For record-keeping purposes, the health information in Wellport used to create your Clinical Health Summary will be retained, *but will no longer be viewable electronically* by clinicians, and no additional information will be added.